

## BOOKS OF INTEREST SEEN IN REVIEW AND COMMENT

## THE BOOK OF THE WEEK.

THE SUPERNATURAL IN MODERN ENGLISH FICTION. By Dorothy Scarborough, Ph. D. (G. P. Putnam's Sons.)

There is an admirable book for a restricted public. So the first point of criticism must be to point out the nature of that restriction, in order that the book may fairly find those readers for whom it is meant and by whom it will be enjoyed. It is a book about books; intended therefore for bookish people, for the student and the lover of literature, the folk of libraries and colleges—in general for all that class of readers who are already well and widely read. If you have a fair present memory of your English classics from Scott to Kipling, if the Gothic Novel means a definite thing to you, if you are not above an innocent pleasure in folklore and the legends of the mysterious, nor beneath appreciating a veiled quotation or the subtle irony of a clever phrase, then this book is for you.

Primarily it is, as its title and the degree of the author suggest, a work of scholarship, a study of the source and development of the supernatural element in consciously artistic literature; scholarly enough indeed, and based upon an exhaustive survey of the available material. But there the wonder begins. What business has a work of sheer scholarship to be the expression of a wise and merry personality, to be written after this fashion, with humor and irony and colloquial cleverness of phrase, and an almost rollicking delight in the subject running through it all, like the tone of a happy worker at his work? These things are not of the desk and the dusty tome, they are of the student's lamp. What has sunshine to do with scholarship? Or by what alchemy does this lady distill such honest pleasure from the analysis of a thousand ghostly narratives? First of all, she must thoroughly enjoy them as ever Traddles did the skeletons upon his slate. And, furthermore, she must be a very considerable person. The genius of the book is not unknown to us—by that name do the baser sort profanely denote the learned lady doctors of the schools. But Miss Scarborough, by the internal evidence of her book—is it not also her thesis?—comes near being a *genie*.

Soberly enough, the book is a critical analysis of the whole machinery of ghosts, elves' dreams, magic, mythology and the like in the English fiction of the last two centuries, made pleasant reading by both its spirit and its style. There is an introductory chapter on the Gothic romance and another on the influence of sources of supernatural ideas, chiefly foreign. These two chapters and the concluding one are beyond reasonable expectation scholarly and delightful. The interim is taken up by discussion of the mystic material in the fiction of the nineteenth century, classified by chapters as Modern Ghosts, the Devil and His Allies, Supernatural Life, Folk Tales and Supernatural Science. And it is here that the book shows what the best must somewhere show, its share of failure. It is a particularly irritating kind of failure, too; the discussion degenerates for pages on end into a mere cataloguing of instances, dry and banal and not even accurately cited. It is as if the author, having set down with infectious enjoyment her inferences and her critical analysis of the data in question, found herself now confronted with the ungrateful task of sorting and listing the data themselves, which having mentally squeezed dry she desired only to be done as soon as might be; so that she went about the task of particularizing them in a mood of weary disgust, careless of even common accuracy in the proofreading. To misquote Kipling's titles, to speak of the heroine of the *Forest of Arden* as *Isabel* is desirable, to call *Madame de Mervilles* *Mervilles*—this sort of thing occurs so often as to be unparaphrasable by reason of its very pettiness. Nor does it seem possible that the woman who observes of ghosts that they are the only permanent denizens of this world, and of the Devil that man has created him in his own image, could so completely miss the point of *The Turn of the Screw* or *The Day After Tomorrow* or *The Crock of Gold*. Perhaps the trouble is with the classification, and to have constructed by authors and their methods of treating the supernatural material would have given better results than this mere sorting of specimens. Certainly there is a wide gulf between Miss Scarborough's best work and her worst, and the discriminating question seems to be simply whether she is for the time being herself interested or bored with it.

She is interested most of the time, and interesting; with an almost motherly interest in normal, ordinary spooks, and a connoisseur's joyful avidity to pounce upon some rare exotic specimen. The mere choice of subject was of course no excuse for not every candidate for a degree would hit upon one so fertile in romantic possibilities. But then one reflects with horror what dreary stuff the Teutonic type of scholarship would have made of such a theme as this. We may be glad that it was Miss Scarborough who chose it for her own. If she nods now and then, surely even a ghost hunter may grow drowsy. Her errors are too obvious to mislead. She has made something useful for the scholar and something enjoyable for the lover of strange, uncanny tales. And her book is good original research and better original contemplation.

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## PERIODICALS IN WAR TIME

The Government has no more useful limitations in keeping before the public the vital questions of the day than some of our big periodicals. A leading exponent of this patriotic attitude is the *Literary Digest*, which publishes to-day a striking article pointing the way in which every citizen can support the Government in the execution of its enormous task.

The subject of the article is an earnest call to every unmarried man, with an income of \$1,000 or more, and to every married man with an income of \$2,000 or more, to take

prompt steps to make report to the Government. "The Treasury Department is already laboring under the extraordinary difficulties imposed by the war. By giving it his hearty cooperation each citizen will be doing his share at least to ease its burden and to lighten the heavy responsibilities of the new Commissioner of Internal Revenue, who, many say, is the most able and most efficient aid that this important branch of the Government has ever had."

This is only a small part of the eloquent argument advanced by the *Literary Digest*, which owing to its live methods and interesting contents is building up an immense circulation.

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perils of the North on unknown shores. Some delicious bits of personal description of the Aleutian natives are most amusing, notably the word portrait of the savage orator Jarochah, who could not stop orating even to eat. Also the description of an Eskimo bedroom, a "furry sanctum," with walls, ceiling and floor of fur, sounds mighty good just at the moment these lines are being written. The deep hatred of the lust for killing which filled the soul of Muir, the lover of all nature, finds vent in one or two very human little outbursts, such as the following:

"In nothing does man, with his grand notions of heaven and charity, show forth his innate, lowbred wild animalism more clearly than in his treatment of his brother beasts . . . there is no recognition of rights, only murder in one form or another."

THE HOUSE OF LYME. By Lady Newton. (New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons.) \$6.50.

Now that the old order is changing everywhere, and possibly more (though less noisily) in England than elsewhere, this chronicle of an old family and a grand old house comes with a double value. What is told here in its intimate personal history of the Leigh family of Lyme Park is characteristic of so much which will never be again that the handsome volume with its wealth of illustrations and rich store of facts can take its deserved place on the library shelf of history. The history of England forms a colorful background for the history of the Leigh family who took an important part in the political and social life of their various generations. The fine old house known as Lyme Park, one of England's show places, which housed them for so long, we hear, began in 1445, and built and rebuilt until 1831, when the structure was completed about as it now stands, except for interior concessions made to changing ideas of personal comfort in living. Indeed Lady Newton's book, in many little touches, diaries, private letters, household accounts, gives a picture of the conditions of living in earlier days even for a great and rich family of landowners, which would make an artisan of to-day shiver and rejoice that he was born in a more prosaic but comfortable age.

Newton tells us that it was the discovery of an old pack of letters, which first induced her to write this history of a house, and she modestly hopes it may find at least a small circle of readers who will not be bored by it. But the work has been so well done that it will find many readers to enjoy the word portraits of men and women of past days, shown us in a simple human way that brings them humanly nearer to us. In fact it is ever so much more interesting to learn how people lived in those far-off days if we are told of it as illustrated in the lives of actual individuals. When we read Sir Peter Leigh's account of his traveling expenses or Lady Leigh's household diary we remember the details much more than if they were given us as impersonal historical fact.

THE SHADOW ON THE STONE. By Margaret Bryant. (Duffield & Co.) \$1.35.

The schemes of idealists rarely succeed because they have to be financially supported by "successful business men." Niel Meredith, a dreamer, had devoted his entire life in materializing a scheme for founding a settlement, "one point where there was unity of aim, action and ambition. One spot untouched by any consideration of worldly success or popularity, unconcerned with material matters of profit and loss. Built up with clean

hands—that's essential. Founded on and universal love and desire for true racial advance." Niel has many enthusiastic followers, the foremost of them his best friend, Ambrose Dale, a young man with a keen business sense, but no money, and passionately attached to him. In talking over the plans, Niel earnestly attracts a financier, James Farr, who offers to support the plan. Dale is sceptical that Farr can be as personally interested as the supporters of the idea should be, but he is half persuaded by Niel's great faith in human nature. The plans materialize rapidly, and more an island in the Baltic Sea, is leased from the Swedish Government, while architects and workmen are engaged. In the meantime Ambrose Dale comes under obligations to Farr, and is forced to tell him of the radium which he had discovered on the island. Farr wishes to start a business concern and tries to force Niel to consent by threatening to withdraw his financial support. There is a terrific struggle of wills, and although Niel wins his nerves are so shattered that he dies in result of a subsequent accident. But Dale, with Pauline Paget, Farr's godchild, and several other broken-hearted admirers of Niel, after hesitating between spending their energies in revenge on Farr or on going on with the scheme, take up the work where their friend left it. The characters are real and likeable; even Farr is not the conventional villain. His interests in Mora were not wholly selfish, but his business instincts were strongest in him. The story is interesting and well told.

THE HUMAN SIDE OF BIRDS. By Royal Dixon. (Frederick A. Stokes Company.) \$1.00 net.

Among many good things in this appealing "nature study from a new angle," about the most appealing to one's sense of justice is the plea for a rehabilitation of the English sparrow, and the story of the remarkable qualities possessed by our barnyard turkey in common with his wild ancestors. The stories, in word or picture, of queer odd exotic birds are quite fascinating, as meeting new and strange things and people always is. But finding out new and unknown

traits in our old friends who were so familiar that we were inclined to look on them with contempt, is a psychic exploration of great interest and of much value for our own character. How many of us know that the wild turkey of America, the immediate ancestor of our own tame bird is a "leader among classical dancers?" And that the turkey hen is the most devoted mother in the whole bird kingdom? Even the tame turkey employs the most intricate and interesting dancing steps in his courtship, and has other qualities it pays us to watch. And as for the English sparrow, now considered much in the light of a pariah among birds, it is good to hear that:

"This bird celebrity is perhaps the most abused and misunderstood friend of the human race . . . his sing and short-courts have been greatly overestimated. . . . He is the most intelligent of birds, living always on intimate terms with man. It is this intelligence which causes him never to trust the lord of creation. There is no bird that can measure up to the sparrow in the destruction of

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THE WOLF-CUB. By Patrick and Terence Casey. (Little, Brown & Co.) \$1.40.

Here is all the material for an excellent romance. But the authors have made a far better story than they appear capable of writing. With the lawless mountain life of Spain for a background, with gypsies and bull-fighters and brigands and their enemies of the Guardia Civil, with a cunning and desperate bandoler, a dark, ripe maid of the Zincoli and a Hidalgo's beautiful daughter for leading figures, they have woven a clever and exciting plot, compact of stirring elements of romance and planned and proportioned with no little skill. But there their merit ends. The book is weakly and tritely written, without power or color or character, so that one has need of some critical sense to recognize how essentially good is the story thus ineptly told. The spirit indeed is willing but the style is weak; it is not always even grammatical. And yet the story is there. The reader who is insensitive to bad writing and avid of passionate adventure, who has imagination enough to supplement for himself in brighter colors the scenes and people which the printed narrative labors to convey, may still find means of enjoyment. The story would make an admirable moving picture. On the screen all its merits would be intensified and its failure in the art of words would matter not at all.

WANTED A TORTOISE SHELL. By Peter Blundell. (John Lane Co.) \$1.40.

Nonsense books are sometimes very enjoyable things, even 310 pages of them. But after all the author of a nonsense book should remember that he is writing for a reader who is at least fairly intelligent. The plot of Mr. Blundell's book is as obvious as its custard pie humor; the characters wanted a tortoise shell. In India there is an old archeologist—he, of course, is as necessary to a farcical story as a detective to a mystery tale—with a beautiful daughter. There is a Swede, a villain, at whom the reader is privileged to laugh at his heart's content.

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